

Message Text

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R 130830Z SEP 76

FM AMCONSUL HONG KONG

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1960

INFO AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY TAIPEI

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

USLO PEKING

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L HONG KONG 10691

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MPOL, PINT, CH

SUBJ: THE PLA AND THE POST-MAO LEADERSHIP

REF: A. HONG KONG 10632 (NOTAL), B. HONG KONG 10253,

C. HONG KONG 9604, D. PEKING 1650

SUMMARY AND INTRODUCTION. DURING THE PAST FEW DAYS, CONDOLENCE
MESSAGES FROM PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY PARTY COMMITTEES IN THE
PROVINCES PLEDGE THE PLA TO "RALLY CLOSELY AROUND THE PARTY
CENTRAL COMMITTEE" AND UNDERScore THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PLA
IN SHAPING THE POST-MAO POLITICAL LEADERSHIP. IN PREPARING
FOR THE POST-MAO ERA, THE CHINESE LEADERSHIP HAS RECENTLY MADE
A CONCERTED EFFORT TO HEIGHTEN THE PUBLIC IMAGE OF UNITY, WITH
HUA KUO-FENG ACTING AS THE TRANSITION LEADER (REF A). WHETHER
THIS UNITY WILL SOLIDIFY OR BREAK-OUT INTO RENEWED FACTIONAL
INFIGHTING DEPENDS ON MANY FACTORS, INCLUDING THE FUTURE
POLITICAL ROLE OF THE PLA AND UNRESOLVED MILITARY ISSUES.
END SUMMARY AND INTRODUCTION

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1. DURING THE PAST SEVERAL MONTHS, THE CHINESE LEADERSHIP HAS ATTEMPTED TO INCREASE THE PUBLIC IMAGE OF THE PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY AND PROJECT A SENSE OF MILITARY RESPONSIVENESS TO AND APPROVAL OF THE INTERIM LEADERSHIP. IN CONTRAST TO THE EARLY SUMMER, WHEN MILITARY ISSUES, INCLUDING TENG'S CONTROVERSIAL PROGRAM FOR REORGANIZATION AND MODERNIZATION OF THE DEFENSE ESTABLISHMENT, WERE BEING HOTLY DEBATED (REFS B, D), WE HAVE RECENTLY SEEN:

- A PERSISTENT EMPHASIS ON THE HEROIC ROLE OF THE PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY IN HANDLING EARTHQUAKE RELIEF;
- EVIDENCE THAT MILITARY DECISION-MAKING BODIES MIGHT HAVE MOVED AHEAD IN RESOLVING SOME OF THE MORE CONTROVERSIAL ASPECTS OF TENG'S MILITARY PROGRAM (REF C);
- INDICATIONS THAT MILITARY MODERNIZATION, IN ITSELF, HAS NOT BECOME THE FOCUS OF ATTACKS ON TENG'S MILITARY PROGRAM AND MAY VERY WELL CONTINUE (REF B).

2. MOREOVER, THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE'S MILITARY COMMISSION, THE MOST IMPORTANT MILITARY DECISION-MAKING BODY, HAS BEEN PROMINENTLY ASSOCIATED WITH KEY LEADERSHIP ACTIONS, INCLUDING THE LEADERSHIP TURNOUT AT THE SEPTEMBER 1 EARTHQUAKE HEROES CONFERENCE AND MORE RECENTLY WITH THE VARIOUS MESSAGES CONCERNING MAO'S DEATH. SUCH ATTENTION STANDS IN CONTRAST TO THE LACK OF MENTION OF THE MILITARY COMMISSION IN CONNECTION WITH THE DEATHS OF CHOU EN-LAI IN JANUARY AND CHU TEH IN JULY. ALTHOUGH THIS CAN BE ATTRIBUTED TO MAO'S POSITION AS CHAIRMAN OF THAT BODY, ITS PUBLIC ROLE SEEMS DESIGNED TO UNDERSOCCRE MILITARY ASSOCIATION WITH AND APPROVAL FOR THE INTERIM LEADERSHIP.

3. HOWEVER, THE ISSUES OF POLITICAL CONTROL OVER THE PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY AND FILLING KEY MILITARY VACANCIES WILL UNDOUBTEDLY REMAIN CONTROVERSIAL. IMPORTANT MILITARY FIGURES, INCLUDING THREE MILITARY REGION COMMANDERS AND THE MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENSE, ARE INFLUENTIAL MEMBERS OF THE POLITBURO AND WILL HAVE A DIRECT ROLE IN DETERMINING THE OUTCOME OF THESE ISSUES. WITH MAO'S DEATH AND TENG'S PURGE, THE CHAIRMANSHIP OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE'S MILITARY COMMISSION AND THE PLA CHIEF OF STAFF POSITION ARE APPARENTLY STILL VACANT. ALTHOUGH THE NCNA ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE

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LEADERSHIP PAYING ITS RESPECTS TO THE REMAINS OF THE CHAIRMAN SEEMS TO INDICATE THAT PLA VETERAN SU YU COULD BE PLAYING AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN SETTLING THESE ISSUES AS A "LEADING MEMBER" OF THE MILITARY COMMISSION, WE SUSPECT THAT MILITARY QUESTIONS MIGHT NOT BE RESOLVED FOR MONTHS AND COULD BECOME ENTWINED IN RENEWED FACTIONAL INFIGHTING.

4. IN THE SHORT RUN, THE MILITARY WILL PROBABLY FALL INTO

PLACE BEHIND THE PUBLIC SHOW OF LEADERSHIP UNITY, AS LONG AS FACTIONAL PROBLEMS DON'T BOIL TO THE SURFACE. EVEN IF THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST TENG AND "OTHER CAPITALIST ROADERS IN THE PARTY" SHOULD CONTINUE, THE PLA WILL PROBABLY AVOID INVOLVEMENT WITH CONTENTIOUS POLITICAL ISSUES AND OBEY THE MAOIST DICTUM THAT THE "PARTY COMMANDS THE GUN." ONLY IF AN OPEN CHALLENGE TO THE NEW LEADERSHIP RESULTS IN A SUBSTANTIAL BREAKDOWN OF AUTHORITY IN THE PROVINCES DO WE FORESEE THE ACTIVE INTERVENTION OF THE PEOPLE'S LIBERATION ARMY IN THE CIVILIAN POLITICAL PROCESS. IN ANY CASE, IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT THE NEW LEADERSHIP WILL NOT WANT TO ALLOW THEIR FACTIONAL DIFFERENCES TO REACH SUCH PROPORTIONS AND WILL BE MORE CONCERNED WITH PROVIDING AUTHORITATIVE AND COMPETENT LEADERSHIP IN AN ATTEMPT TO RESTORE CHINA'S SENSE OF DIRECTION IN THE NEXT FEW MONTHS.
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